

## World-class media hub for SA

The newly launched JT Comms African Media Hub, located in Johannesburg, aims to boost the international profile of African arts and culture while providing a welcoming space for media professionals to work and network.

By [Janine Erasmus](#) 12 Oct 2009



Vanessa Perumal

Although the facility is tailored for those from the cultural industries, it's also open to journalists and businesspeople from all other sectors.

Centrally located in the quiet suburb of Craighall, in the north of Johannesburg, the multi-purpose media centre provides facilities for meetings, holding press conferences, conducting television and radio interviews and wirelessly filing completed stories.

It's also equipped for brainstorming sessions, holding workshops and conducting research, training sessions, listening sessions, webcasting, product launches and more.

The centre, which is still in the last stages of being fitted with infrastructure and equipment, is a long-time vision of communications specialist Vanessa Perumal, co-partner in the wholly black- and female-owned [Communication Solutions](#).

"I travelled to Germany with the South African delegation that brought the FIFA World Cup here," said Perumal, "and there I had a chance to see the German media centre, and to experience how well it worked

Back in South Africa she was struck by the fact that there was no equivalent facility available here. Deciding not to wait until somebody else came up with the idea, and with the famous Gandhi quote - "Be the change you want to see in the world" - in her mind, she resolved to do something about it.

"I want this place to be a physical hub where journalists from all over the world can feel comfortable," she said, "and where African journalists can tell our stories our way."

The African press has long lamented the fact that overseas media houses tend to portray a very bleak picture of Africa to the world, focusing on dark and depressing topics and overlooking the many positive stories that emerge from the continent every day.

Other initiatives such as the [A24 media](#) channel, launched in mid-2008 by veteran media entrepreneur Sal Amin, are planning to redress that situation.

If South Africa and other African countries want to endure on the global arts stage, added Perumal, they must capture the essence of all that is good about their cultural industries, and ensure that the rest of the world knows about it.

## **Global exposure**

Perumal explained that her hope was to give journalists a convenient and comfortable place to be productive, so that they would feel inspired to produce more substantial content about South Africa and the rest of the continent. The result would be more global exposure for South African and African culture.

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The centre's launch, held in late September 2009, was attended by the local and international media community as well as local arts stalwarts such as renowned mezzo-soprano Sibongile Khumalo, poet Lebo Mashile, and storyteller Gcina Mhlophe.

CEO of the [Southern African Music Rights Organisation](#) (Samro) Nick Motsatse delivered the keynote speech, and Tawana Kupe, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the [University of the Witwatersrand](#), commented in his address that the innovative hub was just what the media and arts on the continent needed.

## **Connecting with Africa**

One of the centre's first projects was the African Arts in Dialogue, a public symposium held on 23 September 2009.

Local arts academics and writers met with a delegation of cultural journalists from Senegal, Cameroon, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, to discuss ways to promote African arts on the world stage. The international contingent was also present at the media centre launch.

This important task can only be achieved through communication and better understanding between local cultural journalists and their colleagues in other parts of the continent.

Among the visitors - who represented film, radio, television and print genres - were Senegalese radio journalist and jazz enthusiast Michael Soumah, Cameroonian film critic Telesphore Mba Bizo, journalist and artist John Owoo from Ghana, and Kenyan writer Joseph Ngunjiri.

The gathering took place at Samro's offices. Samro is the body that administers music public performance rights in Southern Africa, and was a partner in the symposium, along with [African Synergy](#), Marimba Media and the JT Comms media hub.

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